

to look at that part of that bill, the Women, Infants, and Children's Program during this holiday season; to sign the farm bill because of a lot of reasons, but in this context because of the nutrition funding which is included in it that I mentioned, as well as other nutrition increases. There are billions of dollars more for nutrition in the farm bill. So I ask the President, No. 3, to sign the farm bill.

And No. 4, and finally, to release the remaining \$20 million in contingency funding for the so-called LIHEAP program—another acronym, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program. A lot of people know about it and depend on it. Just \$20 million; a tiny eyedrop worth of money in terms of a Federal budget into the trillions.

I ask the President not only to read a letter and not only to respond to it, but, most importantly, to take action which is asked for in this letter and the pleas for help from families across America. U.S. Senators, Members of Congress, and others have asked this President to do his part in this holiday season because the President, just like the Congress, has power—power to help people, power to improve their lives, and power to do all he can to help them every time throughout the year but especially at this time of the year.

I conclude with this: In this season of hope, let it be said of those who have power—real power—let it be said of those who have power that they helped those who are hungry, those who are cold, and those who will live through yet another season of despair. Let it be said of us, and let it be said of the President, that he fulfilled and met his obligation to help those Americans who need it, especially in this season.

Mr. President, I thank you and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

CONGRATULATING SENATOR CASEY

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, first, while the Senator from Pennsylvania is on the floor, let me congratulate him for an extraordinary first year in the Senate. He has made a real difference in his first year. We all are grateful he is present here to assist this Senate and hopefully achieving some very important results. I congratulate him on his freshman year.

Mr. CASEY. I thank the Senator.

MESSAGE TO THE IRAQI POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I want to review the outcome of last evening's debate and vote on the Iraq amendment that I offered along with Senators REED, VOINOVICH, HAGEL, SNOWE, REID, SMITH, and SALAZAR.

The amendment expressed the sense of the Congress that the missions of the U.S. forces in Iraq should transition to counterterrorism operations,

and training, equipping, and supporting Iraqi forces, as well as force protection, and that—and this is, perhaps, the most critical, the important part of the amendment we voted on—that it should be the goal to complete that transition by the end of 2008.

The vote on our amendment was 50 yeas and 45 nays.

Legislating on Iraq is a difficult matter because of the need to gain 60 votes in order to overcome a filibuster, and it was made perhaps even more difficult last night because the Republican leader stated that the President would veto the Consolidated Appropriations Act if it contained our amendment.

Now, imagine that. The President of the United States would veto funds for the troops if 60 or more Senators simply expressed their nonbinding opinion that a goal should be to bring most of our troops home by the end of next year. I would hope the President would welcome at least the nonbinding advice of the Congress and not threaten funding for the troops if that advice were forthcoming.

Despite a great deal of pressure, including the veto threat, our amendment secured six Republican votes—more Republican votes than amendments to change course in Iraq have secured to date. Senators VOINOVICH, HAGEL, SNOWE, SMITH, COLLINS, and DOLE joined 44 of the 46 Democrats who were present to produce a 50-vote majority in favor of our amendment.

I am confident that at least four of the five absent Senators would have supported our amendment, as they have done in the past. So we would have had 54 votes in favor of our amendment, which would have been the most votes thus far for this type of a policy change in Iraq.

Now, what does that majority Senate vote mean, last night's majority vote? What message does it send to the White House, the American people, the Iraqi political leadership, and the Iraqi people?

I believe the message is that more and more Senators are embracing the view that the American people reflected during the last election a little over a year ago; namely, that we want to change course in Iraq, and we want to have a reasonable timetable for the return of most of our troops, and that we have reached the limits of our patience with the Iraqi political leadership. I hope the President takes full notice of last night's majority vote, although the majority will was thwarted by a filibuster. I am sure he is aware of the vote, since the Republican leader said the President would veto the legislation if it contained our amendment.

I hope the American people understand a growing majority of the Senate agrees with their view that we need to establish a goal for the reduction of most of our forces in Iraq and the goal should be most should leave Iraq by the end of next year.

I hope the Iraqi political leaders understand a growing majority of the

Senate is willing to vote to change course in Iraq as a way to bring pressure on them to make the long-promised political compromises that virtually everyone agrees are required to end the violence in Iraq.

I hope Prime Minister Maliki, in particular, understands what the U.S. Department of State said on November 21 about him and the other political leaders in Iraq. This is an extraordinary finding by the Department of State. I hope it gets somehow or other through to Prime Minister Maliki. Here is what the Department of State report said:

Senior U.S. military commanders now portray the intransigence of Iraq's Shiite-dominated government as the key threat facing the U.S. effort in Iraq, rather than al-Qaida terrorists, Sunni insurgents, or Iranian-backed militias.

I wish the President of the United States would read his own State Department report so that not only would the majority of the Senate adopt resolutions intending to put pressure on the Iraqi leadership by telling them the open-ended commitment of American forces is over, but that the President of the United States would tell the Iraqi leaders what his own State Department said in that November 21 report. It is so important that I am going to repeat it:

Senior U.S. military commanders now portray the intransigence of Iraq's Shiite-dominated government as the key threat facing the U.S. effort in Iraq, rather than al-Qaida terrorists, Sunni insurgents, or Iranian-backed militias.

I hope the members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, the Iraqi Parliament, understand they must find a way to bring about reconciliation or face the consequences of squandering that window of opportunity provided by the military successes of the surge that, as General Odierno notes, will not be open forever. As I did after my trip to Iraq last August, I once again express my personal hope that the Iraqi Parliament will replace Prime Minister Maliki with someone who is willing to strongly push national reconciliation and to replace that Prime Minister with someone less connected to a sectarian group.

Finally, I wish to note that while last night's vote relative to Iraq was the last such vote this year, it is not the last vote the Senate is likely to hold on our policy in Iraq. The \$70 billion approved last night is only about one-third the amount the administration has sought for Iraq and Afghanistan. The next time the Congress considers funding for the war in Iraq, of the many factors that Members will no doubt consider, none will be more important than whether Iraqi political leaders have compromised with each other and assumed responsibility for the future of their own country.

THANKING STAFF AND SENATOR SALAZAR

As others of my colleagues, let me add my thanks to our staffs, the Senate staff, our pages, all the people who make it possible for us to try to do the

best job we can do. We don't often express our thanks to our staffs, to our pages, but this is surely the appropriate time of year to pause for a moment to express that gratitude to them. Without their support, without their assistance, it would not be possible for us to function. They make it possible for us to do a lot better than we otherwise would and even to make it possible for us to do some important things once in a while.

I wish to also express my thanks to the Presiding Officer. General Salazar I almost called Senator SALAZAR—Senator SALAZAR has been of invaluable assistance to me on so many matters, and I know that feeling exists with other Members of the Senate. As I talk about Iraq this afternoon, looking at our Presiding Officer, Senator SALAZAR, I am reminded of the countless numbers of times and the efforts Senator SALAZAR has made to try to pull this body together to see if we couldn't make a difference in terms of Iraq policy. That effort to achieve a bridge across the aisle, to bring Senators together, is something which Senator SALAZAR does as well as any Member of this body. Even though we don't often or always succeed in achieving bipartisan results, we would achieve them far fewer times but for the assistance and help of our Presiding Officer. So I wish to add my thanks to him as well.

I yield the floor. I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEVIN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE SENATE

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I come to the floor this evening, in the closing hours of the year 2007, to make a few comments.

First, at the beginning of this year, the beginning of this Congress and the first year, I believe, we have been a Congress of robust achievement, which has made significant change, and that we must also continue to be agents of change in the future because additional change is needed. We have done some good things for this country. There is much more change we need to do.

We have made change in moving forward and seeking a new direction in Iraq and holding the administration accountable on that issue. There is more we have to do in achieving that new direction in Iraq.

We have made significant change in terms of moving forward toward energy independence. There is more work we need to do to achieve real energy independence.

We moved forward in crafting the best farm bill, in my view, in several

decades. We need to get that farm bill across the finish line.

We made progress in the Senate dealing with health care issues, including passage of the Children's Health Insurance Program. But we somehow need to get that over the President's veto pen and start addressing the other issues relating to health care and health care reform.

We have made progress in the arena of education, with passage of the Higher Education Authorization Act and providing financial aid to students across the country and the passage of the Head Start Program. But we now know we still need to move ahead and make more progress and be agents of change with respect to No Child Left Behind.

We have made significant progress in the Wounded Warriors Act, providing the resources we need to take care of our nearly 25 million veterans in America. We need to make sure we stay on top of those issues with 1½ million veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. It is important that we not lose sight of the Nation's promise to take care of our veterans.

There has been a lot of good work done, but there is still more work ahead. We must, in this Senate Chamber, figure out a way to continue to be agents of change to bring about change in the direction of America.

I want to comment on a couple of the subjects I touched on.

First, Iraq. Iraq remains the major national/international foreign policy issue of the United States. The Presiding Officer, the senior Senator from Michigan, has helped lead us from the wilderness in which we found ourselves with respect to the war in Iraq to move forward to what I consider to be a different level of debate today in America.

For the first 6 years of this administration, they essentially controlled all of the cards. It was only with the change in leadership in the Senate and in the House of Representatives that, today, there is accountability that is occurring with respect to the war in Iraq.

The senior Senator from Michigan, the very distinguished chairman of the Armed Services Committee, has really led us in the search for trying to find that new direction for Iraq. It was the Senator from Michigan who conceived of the fact that we needed to move away from having our troops in a combat mission over to the more limited missions of counterterrorism, force protection, border security, and moving forward in the more limited presence in Iraq, and sending, as he has so often said on the floor of the Senate, an unmistakable message to the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi people that it is they who have to get Iraq together. It is not up to us in America or to our troops on the ground to resolve the political problems Iraq faces today. That unmistakable message the Iraqis

have received would not have been received had it not been for the leadership of Senator LEVIN, Senator REID, and others in this Chamber who stood up and said we need to have a new direction in Iraq.

There may be some around the country who are saying: Well, what has happened, because we are still in Iraq and the money is still being provided to our troops? But there has been a significant change that has occurred. We know last night, for example, on the vote that occurred with respect to the funding of our troops in Iraq, the \$70 billion provided to our troops was provided to make sure our troops are not without money as they carry out the mandate of the Commander in Chief. But it was not the \$196 billion that was requested by the President of the United States. It was an installment. It is the first time we get to a point where there is this kind of sequential funding. That will allow the Congress and the Senate, under the leadership of Senator LEVIN, the Presiding Officer, to continue to move forward to try to seek a new direction in Iraq and to continue to hold the administration accountable with respect to its efforts on the ground in Iraq.

Yes, when I look at the issue of Iraq, from my perspective and involvement, I believe we have made significant progress in terms of creating a new direction and a new momentum in Iraq. I appreciate the effort of the chairman of the Armed Services Committees in that debate. I appreciate his leadership and for inviting me and others to go with him to Iraq a year or so ago, along with Senator WARNER. We were on the ground meeting with Iraqi officials, as well as our military leadership, to make sure we had the best information as we move forward with the issue on Iraq.

Secondly, I wish to comment on energy. For me, the issue of energy is one of the most important signature issues of the 21st century. I don't think we can do anything that is any less important. This is of monumental importance not only to the people of America but to our entire globe and all of civilization.

The legislation we passed this year, which the President signed today, is legislation that is important because it moves us forward in terms of getting a higher level of efficiency with respect to how we use oil, with respect to how we use electricity in our homes and buildings, and with respect to how we deal with carbon sequestration, to begin dealing with global warming. But there is more work we must do to move forward with an energy package that is something that is doable here among all of us in this Congress. We need to make sure the jet engine powers this clean energy economy into the 21st century, created out of the Finance Committee, which lost by 1 vote—we had 59 votes in the Senate to get that